

This Day in History... April 23, 1616

Death of William Shakespeare

Renowned playwright, poet, and actor, William Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616, in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England.

Shakespeare's exact birthdate is unknown. He was baptized on April 26, 1564, so he was likely born a few days before that. Some older sources claimed he was born on April 23, but no one knows for sure.

Born and raised in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England, Shakespeare was the oldest surviving child of a leatherworker and alderman. His mother was from the prominent Arden family. Raised in this successful family, Shakespeare likely attended grammar school until about age 15.

Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway in 1582 and together they had three children. His only son, Hamnet, died at the age of 11 in 1596. Little is known of Shakespeare's professional career after the birth of his children until he became associated with the London theatre scene in 1592. Many historians have tried to piece together these "lost years" but have had little success.

It's unknown exactly when Shakespeare began writing, but by 1592, several of his plays were being performed in London. Two years later, his plays were exclusively performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later called the King's Men), a group of players of which Shakespeare was a member. They quickly became the leading theater company in London.

Shakespeare produced the majority of his works between 1589 and 1613. Many of his early plays were comedies and histories. He then transitioned to tragedies (such as *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*) until about 1608. After that, he spent his final writing years on tragicomedies, also known as romances, and worked with other playwrights.

In 1599, the players built the Globe Theatre along the River Thames. Around this same time, Shakespeare's name was growing famous and it was printed on title pages to gain attention. In addition to writing, Shakespeare would also act in his own plays and those of others. One source wrote that he often played "kingly" roles.

Shakespeare spent much of his life between time with his family in Stratford and as part of the theater scene in London. It's believed he retired to Stratford in 1613 but continued to visit London in his later years. He died in Stratford on April 23, 1616, at the age of 52. Today, Shakespeare is considered the greatest English writer, England's national poet and the Bard of Avon. Over the course of his life, he wrote about 39 plays, 154 sonnets, and two long narrative poems.



Issued for Shakespeare's 400th birthday.

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